

Washington State Patrol Media Release

Chief John R. Batiste



Captain Jeff DeVere
Government and Media Relations
(360) 753-5299 – office
(360) 753-5469 – fax
<http://www.wsp.wa.gov>

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Contact: Sgt. Dennis Bosman, WSP
Phone: (360) 704-2955
Contact: Jim Stevenson, DSHS
Phone: (360) 725-1915

WASHINGTON STATE PATROL ARRESTS WOMAN FOR “MEDICAL IDENTITY THEFT” - Goal was drugs, not money -

Washington State Patrol detectives have arrested an Everett woman on allegations she used another woman’s identity to receive nearly \$180,000 worth of medical services and prescription drugs.

Barbara Reuter, 48, was taken into custody this morning with assistance from the Edmonds Police Department. She was booked into the Snohomish County Jail for investigation of 30 counts of fraud.

“Identity thieves are usually interested in getting money to buy illegal drugs on the street,” said Capt. Steve Davis of WSP’s Criminal Investigation Division. “In a case of ‘medical identity theft,’ the suspect assumes the identity of an insured person and starts visiting doctors. The victim’s insurance company pays for the doctor visits and the prescribed narcotics.”

The victim in this case was a Medicaid client of the Washington Department of Social and Health Services. But in late 2007, a health plan that contracts with DSHS spotted what appeared to be a duplicate billing and notified the agency of the discrepancy.

“The health plan’s billing department realized they were paying bills for virtually simultaneous appointments for the same person,” said WSP Detective Dave Startup. “The fact that they were watching their pennies led to the unraveling of this scheme.”

The DSHS Office of Patient Review and Coordination pieced together the pattern of “doctor shopping” being used to obtain drugs and then managed to identify Reuter as the imposter by comparing records between different benefit programs. That information was then turned over to the Washington State Patrol for a full investigation.

The identity theft apparently began in 2006 when Reuter and the real client shared a room in a homeless shelter. Reuter used the other woman’s identification specifics – date of birth, Social Security Number, client identification and other information – to persuade doctors that she was

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a real Medicaid client. In addition, detectives said, she became skillful at presenting doctors with symptoms that would result in prescriptions for narcotics.

Most of the \$180,000 in losses will be borne by the health plan and some individual providers. DSHS lost about \$20,000 in state funds, and the victim of the identity theft did not suffer any financial loss.

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